TRANSCRIPT— DESMA YOUNG

Interviewee: Desma Young

Interviewers: Ruth Ehrlich and Sandra Jackson

Interview Date: May 27, 2019

Location: Home of Desma Young

Length: 1 digital recording; 00:57:03

Transcriber: Lynnie Barrett

RUTH EHRLICH: Today is Monday, May 27, 2019. This is Ruth Ehrlich and Sandra Jackson. We are here with Desma Young at her home, on Cane Creek Road in Fletcher. We are going to talk to Desma about her life in Fairview, okay?

DESMA YOUNG: Okay.

RE: So, if you would start by telling us when you were born, Desma?

DY: 1927, November the 8th.

RE: And where were you born?

DY: Down the road, Cane Creek, my parents lived not far away.

RE: So, were you born at home?

DY: Yeah, back then they didn't go to the hospital.

RE: So, you were born on Cane Creek Road?

DY: Yeah, in the house.

[Laughter]

RE: Now, Desma, have you been married?

DY: Fifty-three years.

RE: What is your spouse's name?

DY: John Henry Young.

RE: Is John Henry still with you?

DY: He has been dead eighteen years. He was a fine man. Good to me.

RE: How about children, do you have children?

DY: Yeah, I had two sons, Gregg Young and Randy Young.

RE: When was Gregg born?

DY: Gregg was born, wait a minute, let me think on that a minute, 1986. Am I saying that right?

RE: I don't know.

DY: 1986.

SANDRA JACKSON: Is he about twenty or thirty then?

DY: He is fifty.

SJ: Then it wouldn't be 1986, it would have been earlier.

RE: 1960 maybe, somewhere in there.

DY: Yeah, I guess so. He is fifty-one.

SJ: So, it would be around '61.

RE: And what month and date was he born?

DY: His birthday is March 26th, 1961.

RE: So, he has had a birthday this year, and he is fifty-one?

DY: Yeah.

RE: What about Randy, when was he born?

DY: He was born in 1951, no, '52.

RE: And what month and date?

DY: July the 10th.

RE: So, he is about sixty-seven or sixty-eight?

DY: Sixty-seven.

RE: Now where did you go to school?

DY: Fairview.

RE: Fairview Elementary.

DY: It was high school too, then.

RE: Fairview Elementary and high school. So, it went through First Grade to Twelfth?

DY: No, they didn't have twelfth grade, I think it was eleventh. We got twelfth when we went to Reynolds.

RE: So, did you go to school beyond Fairview?

DY: No.

RE: You didn't go to college, you didn't go to any technical school, secretarial school or nursing school or any of those schools?

DY: No.

RE: Did you work outside the home?

DY: Yeah.

RE: Tell us what you did.

DY: I worked at Fairview Post Office in Skyland. Postal accounts was the first job that I had. I was about eighteen when I took a job with the postal accounts.

RE: Postal accounts, what did that do?

DY: They key punched weather on these cards and send them through a machine. We punched in the date, the weather.

RE: And then did you work beyond that?

DY: Yeah, I worked at Fairview Post Office for about five years.

RE: And was that all of it?

DY: No, I went to Skyland and worked twenty-eight years, So, I worked about thirty-three years all total.

RE: And at Skyland, were you at the post office too?

DY: Yeah, yeah.

RE: And did you always work in the postal accounts at that time?

DY: No, just separate jobs.

RE: What did you do in addition to postal accounts?

DY: Worked at Fairview Post Office.

RE: Doing what?

DY: Well, doing a little bit of everything up there.

SJ: Like the front desk?

DY: Yeah. Then at Skyland I worked as a clerk.

SJ: Did you like working at the post office?

DY: Yeah, I loved it.

RE: Did you? Twenty-eight years in the postal service. That's pretty good. Did you ever have anybody go postal on you?

DY: No.

SJ: Did you work with Callie Miller?

DY: Yeah, I sure did.

RE: Sandra knows everybody, Desma.

DY: Where are you from, Fairview?

SJ: My husband grew up here.

DY: What was his name?

SJ: Eddie Jackson.

DY: My first grade teacher was Laura Jackson.

SJ: No, they're not kin to her.

RE: So, you grew up, you were born down the road, somewhere in your house on Cane Creek Road.

[Laughter]

Did you have brothers and sisters?

DY: I had four sisters and three brothers.

RE: And which one were you?

DY: I was in the middle of all of them.

RE: Wow! Three sisters and four brothers.

DY: No, three brothers and four sisters.

RE: And you were in the middle?

DY: I was in the middle.

RE: What were your parent's names?

DY: John Dotson and Bertsie Dotson.

RE: Dotson, D-O-T-S-O-N? And what was your Mom's name?

DY: Bertsie, B-E-R-T-S-I-E.

RE: And you were flat in the middle.

DY: Yeah.

RE: So, there were eight children.

DY: Eight children.

RE: Did your family farm? What did your family do?

DY: My daddy was a plumber.

RE: A Plumber.

DY: But my momma always worked in the home.

RE: Did you have a big garden when you were growing up?

DY: Yeah, yeah. We had an oriental garden then. They would take the manure out of the barn and put it on the garden. Then they would plow all that in and make a garden.

RE: How about that. Did you call it an oriental garden?

DY: That's the way they do now.

SJ: Environmental or oriental?

DY: Oriental. They don't use any kind of fertilizer.

RE: Okay, and what did you raise on that farm, what did your parents raise?

DY: Just a garden.

RE: Like, what was in that garden? Corn?

DY: It had corn, beans, peppers, everything. And she canned everything she could, my mother did.

RE: Did you help with that canning and gardening?

DY: Yeah, planting the garden. And when we was growing up, we went to the creek, little creek, run down by the house and she would wash.

RE: She washed her clothes in the creek?

DY: No, she had a big wash pot, black wash pot. She'd put them, she'd build a fire under that and get her water hot and she had to scrub board and she would wash the clothes out and then put, then rinse them through that.

RE: Did you help her with that?

DY: Yeah. Put out, she had a clothes line. She loved to see her sheets blow in the wind.

RE: But she got her water from the creek to heat up to scrub her clothes in?

DY: Yeah.

SJ: In the winter time too?

DY: No, in the wintertime I don't know how she done it. We had a Delco System before the power went through here. They had it hooked to stuff like the washing machine and stuff to heat the water and stuff like that.

RE: Now, you said a Delco System before power came, tell us about that. This is the first time we are hearing about somebody talk about the Delco System. What was that?

DY: It's a thing that put power somehow or other with a little motor and it would heat up the water and the, I don't think she cooked. She cooked on a wood stove.

RE: And how long did you live at the house with your mom and dad?

DY: I was about twenty-four years old when I left.

RE: Were you? And did you have some experience cooking with the big black pot outside and washing clothes?

DY: No, no. After I got married, the power had come through here then.

RE: Did you help Mom at any time, scrub the clothes with the big, black pot?

DY: Yeah, sometimes I would.

RE: Did you make apple butter in that big black pot too?

DY: I don't remember she made apple butter. Canned everything she had available to can, you know.

[Laughter]

RE: Then where was it stored? Where were the canned goods stored?

DY: We had a closet, like pantry.

RE: In the kitchen?

DY: Yeah. In the wintertime when it was real, real cold, there was a fireplace in one room and back of the fireplace, there was a fireplace in the other room. We burned wood and cooked, she had a pot that she put coals, she called it on top of that lid. And she would put cornbread and baked potatoes, cook them at the same time.

RE: How about that.

DY: A glass of milk, and made us supper.

RE: Now did you all have farm animals or did you buy milk somewhere?

DY: No, we had a cow. We had some horses. One that they could ride, not a whole lot of horses.

RE: So, you had cows, you had horses, did you have chickens?

DY: We had chickens, some ducks and we had dogs. You know, give them the scraps off the table.

RE: You didn't have pigs to give those scraps to?

DY: Yeah, we had pigs. They would kill them in the fall of the year. Canned everything but the tail.

RE: Did you have to help with any of that?

DY: Well, I did some, but the older sisters, older brother, you know did the biggest part of it.

RE: Could your family have been fed without the garden and the animals being slaughtered?

DY: I doubt it.

RE: That's some tough times. When you were growing up around here on Cane Creek, what did you do for fun?

DY: Went to church.

RE: Where did you go to church?

DY: Oak Grove, down here.

RE: Oak Grove, that church has been there a while?

DY: Yeah it has, yeah.

RE: Did you walk to church?

DY: Yeah. We first started church at Tweeds Chapel, it was the Methodist Church. That was the only church in the community. Then they build Oak Grove and we joined it, we was Baptist.

RE: And at Oak Grove, you said you went to church a lot. Were there a lot of social activities at the church?

DY: Yes. We'd sing in the choir. My sister played the piano. We'd gather around in the afternoon, on a Sunday afternoons and she'd play and we'd sing. And a lot of times the kids in the community would come in too, you know.

RE: Were you playing and singing at home or were you gathering at church?

DY: We was playing and singing at home, we had a piano.

RE: So, other than church, what did you do for fun?

DY: I guess that we visited other people, you know, other girls.

RE: Did you ever get into trouble visiting with those girls?

DY: No, no, not really.

RE: Didn't go play in the creek or slip off when you weren't supposed to? Get all wet and dirty and catch some tadpoles?

DY: In the creek washing clothes, we would play in the creek and my brother would preach and we'd baptize.

[Laughter]

We'd pretend, you know.

RE: So, were you baptized two or three times?

DY: Yeah.

[Laughter]

RE: When you joined Oak Grove, were you baptized in a river?

DY: Yeah, right over there, the creek.

RE: Were you? So, it took that time, because the preacher did it instead of your brother.

DY: And Henry's grandmother was Methodist, you know, and they teased her about not being baptized because, you know, the Methodists sprinkle. So, here she come down the walk with

her clothes on that she wanted to be baptized with. Because, they had her believing she wouldn't go to heaven because she wasn't baptized.

[Laughter]

RE: Who had her believing that, Desma?

DY: Her family.

RE: Her family did? Were they Baptist or were they Methodist?

DY: They was Baptist. Most of them were Baptist. She just happened to be a Methodist.

RE: But she wasn't going to go to heaven if she didn't get baptized.

DY: Baptized. No, but Henry's uncle was a pastor, Seth Perkinson, and he baptized her.

SJ: Seth Perkinson, he was your brother-in-law?

DY: He was Henry's uncle. Married Mr. Young's sister. He played a little ole, he had a little ole box piano he brought and played. He preached down here at Oak Grove for a while. But, Mrs. Young had to fix dinner for all of them every Sunday that he preached, you know.

SJ: Is he the one that did something with kids in the school?

DY: Yeah. Well in the YMCA.

SJ: Well, his grandson and I were friends in high school. Eddie and I were friends with him. Seth Weaver. Yeah, we were friends with him in high school.

DY: Were you? Where did you go to? Asheville High?

SJ: No, Reynolds.

RE: So, how did you meet, how did you meet your husband?

DY: Well, we all went to church down there and I sang in the choir and he told his cousin, says, "I want to marry that girl." Then we started dating. We went together for five years and then got married. Meantime I was working and buying me a car and stuff like that.

RE: You were learning to be an independent woman.

DY: Yeah.

RE: Good for you, good for you. Now, when did you move down to here?

DY: About 1950.

RE: Is that when ya'll got married? When did you get married?

DY: Yeah, we got married in 1950. We moved in here about '52, though, I'd say.

RE: So, did you come straight from your parent's house down to here?

DY: No, no. We lived over there with his parents a while.

RE: And where was that?

DY: The next driveway.

RE: So, you all were really neighbors weren't you? And what did your husband do?

DY: Dairy farmed.

RE: He was a dairy farmer.

DY: Yeah, when they went out of business, they sold out. Government program, you know, paid them so much to quit milking. They got rid of it. It was a good thing, my husband had heart trouble. Had the heart surgery after that, so it was a good thing they got rid of them.

RE: So, did you all have the dairy farm around this vicinity?

DY: Yeah. Mr. Young owned about 210 acres, I think it was, back there and back here. He bought it from Ham, they called him Ham Salad, and he owned more over on the Brush Creek side. But Mr. Young was an inspector for the lumber, grading lumber, and he was afraid he couldn't pay for all of it, so he sold half of it.

RE: That's a lot of property.

DY: It is, it's a lot.

RE: But good if you have dairy cows, right.

DY: Yeah. Oh yeah, he got plenty of room for them.

RE: Did your boys go into dairy farming?

DY: No, no, they worked different places. Randy run a bulldozer, not a bulldozer, a backhoe and Gregg works for Electric Motors. He's got three boys. They adopted a little girl.

RE: You mentioned having horses, did you ride horses?

DY: No, I never did ride them. My younger sister did, she liked riding them.

RE: What kept you busy when you weren't going to church?

DY: Helping Mama. Helping our mother with the chores at home.

RE: That was good preparation for being a wife, wasn't it?

DY: It sure was, yeah. My sister-in-law wanted to know how I knew how to plant a garden and I said, well my mother showed me when I was growing up.

RE: You knew how to cook when you got married, too, didn't you?

DY: Yeah.

RE: Now you have been here a long time and there has been like flooding that's gone on and fires and that kind of thing. Have you, did ya'll ever have any exposure to that?

DY: Yeah, we had floods when the creek get out and flood the bottoms over there.

RE: Did that happen often?

DY: Well, it happened just here lately. Twice, a couple, wasn't it about two weeks ago we had a heavy rain and a flood? It got out then.

RE: So, it never created any problems for your houses or your homes, just your property?

DY: Property, yeah.

RE: Any clean up that had to be done?

DY: Yeah, it did.

RE: And how did that impact you guys when it flooded with the dairy farming?

DY: Well, the barn was far enough away that it didn't bother it. It washed the bridge out a time or two, they had to rebuild it. But they put one in now that takes care of most of that water.

RE: And how about, we hear the cars going by, how about the road, was it always paved out this way?

DY: No, no, it was a dirt road. All you seen was the milkman and the mailman. There wasn't much traffic then. Watkins man would come around with vanilla and different flavors to sell.

SJ: I wish they still did that.

RE: Where did ya'll go for groceries when you were growing up?

DY: Fletcher.

RE: What was there?

DY: There was a Wilkie Grocery Store, gas station and things like that. There wasn't even a gas station back then, on Cane Creek.

RE: So, it was the mailman, the milkman and the Watkins man.

SJ: When was the road paved?

DY: I guess it was paved back, it was paved before we got married, back in the '40s. It was paved before the war.

SJ: See, I was going to say, my grandmother's brother was killed on a wreck on this road in the '40s.

DY: He was? Who was he?

SJ: John Henry Bartlet.

DY: I guess it was paved back in the '40s.

RE: Did you guys have neighbors close by? With 210 acres were you pretty widespread, so you didn't see your neighbors too much?

DY: That's right, we didn't see them too much.

RE: You talked about those girls coming over. How did they get over?

DY: Walked. We walked to church. Of course, we always had a vehicle, but we'd rather walk than to ride.

RE: Gave you a little more time to court, too, didn't it?

DY: Yeah.

[Laughter]

SJ: Who were your girlfriends?

DY: One was Ruby Whitaker and one was Elizabeth Young and let me see, Minnie Dotson. Several people like that.

SJ: Who was Ruby married to?

DY: Ruby married, what was his name? He's been dead so long, I forgot his name. What was his name, Ruby, can't think of it right now. Hadn't thought about it in a long time.

RE: Now who was it that referred her?

SJ: Mary Lou Whitaker.

RE: And who is Mary Lou to you?

DY: Not anything, other than church. She goes up there in church.

RE: Are you still going to Oak Grove to church?

DY: No, no, we are going to one on Brush Creek Road called Tate's(?) Chapel Baptist Church. We don't have many come, people quit going to church, you know it?

RE: A lot of small churches around here. There's a lot of very small churches. I didn't realize how many there were until I started looking for a church.

DY: What are you, Baptist?

RE: Baptist.

DY: Where do you go then?

RE: I go to Skyland First Baptist. I drive from up in Reynolds to go there. But it's a little bit bigger than most of the churches around here.

RE: Did you and your husband build this house?

DY: Well, yeah. Him and his brother-in-law.

RE: He and his brother-in-law built it themselves?

DY: Well, they had to get help on some of it, you know, like the roof and the plumbing, the flooring, maybe. His brother was in the flooring business too, well lumber business, like his daddy. He sent us some flooring out of Harlan, Kentucky.

RE: Now since the house was built, have you had to do any renovations to it?

DY: Oh, yeah, we added on a room, two rooms back there.

RE: You added two rooms and had your two boys here. Your two boys grew up here?

DY: Yeah, they did.

RE: Seems like it has done well for you. Did you ever have people who helped you work in the yard, whether it was you and your husband? Or whether it was you and your family, did you ever have help?

DY: Working in the yard?

RE: Working in the yard or on the farm. Did you ever have any help?

DY: Oh, yeah, on the farm we had plenty of help.

RE: And where did that help come from?

DY: Well, different spots. Most of them lived pretty close by where we were.

RE: So, they were local folks?

DY: Local people.

RE: You didn't have any folks passing through, any immigrants?

DY: No, no, Mexicans. Not like they are now.

RE: Did you have pets when you were growing up?

DY: Oh yeah.

RE: What kind of pets? You said dogs.

DY: Dogs and cats.

RE: Dogs and cats, were they able to come in the house?

DY: Yeah.

RE: How many did you have at a time?

DY: Not many.

RE: Special?

DY: One or two at a time.

RE: Did you have anybody special?

DY: Cat or a dog?

RE: Yes.

DY: Yeah. We had this white dog we called him Fuzz, because he was fluffy. And daddy, somebody come along and wanted to buy it and he sold it. We all cried. Because it was our pet then, you know. But we soon got another dog.

RE: Did it make up for losing Fuzz?

DY: Yeah. My mother used to, we lived, you know, a country life. She used to take a chicken and had a block, you know, and she cut his head off and then had paper and seized that little fuzz that's on the body, then cut it up. I couldn't cut up a chicken to save your neck, could you?

RE: No.

DY: And I don't want to.

SJ: No, I don't want to cut its head off either.

RE: Did you ever cut the chicken's head off?

DY: Lord, no. Wasn't about to.

[Laughter]

RE: Did you ever pluck the chicken?

DY: No.

RE: Never scalded it and plucked it?

DY: No, she always did that.

RE: She always did that. Would you eat the chicken?

DY: Yeah. We'd have it for Sunday dinner. She was just a good country cook.

RE: Did you ever go into Asheville when you were growing up?

DY: Oh yeah.

RE: What took you into Asheville?

DY: The Dime Store, Kress's.

RE: And what would you buy at Kress's that made you want to go to Asheville?

DY: Well, candy and drinks and stuff like that. Clothes, they carried clothes back then.

SJ: You didn't go to Woolworths?

DY: Yeah, yeah. Sometimes you'd eat at Woolworths.

RE: Did your momma sew your clothes or did ya'll buy them?

DY: I had an aunt that did a lot of sewing for us, especially the girls' dresses. She made me little dresses and had a tie up here on the shoulders to take care of the top.

RE: Did she have a pattern or did she make her own pattern?

DY: I guess she had a pattern.

RE: Did she ever make you dresses out of flour sacks?

DY: Yeah, yeah.

RE: Did you all used to argue over who was going to get what flour sack?

[Laughter]

DY: No. They'd make aprons, pillow cases and all kind of stuff out of them.

RE: Yeah, it was a great way to have fabric, wasn't it? You didn't let it go to waste when you had those feed or flour sacks.

DY: No, you didn't. You sure didn't.

RE: Did she sew for you and your other sisters?

DY: Yeah. A lady at Fairview made my oldest sister's. A banquet, was it a banquet they went to? No, it was prom, she went to, she had a, Mrs. Gorkin made her dress.

RE: Really, was it pretty?

DY: Yeah, yeah. Her daughter was in my sister's room at school, so she made their dresses.

RE: Did you get a lot of hand-me-downs, or did you get new clothes?

DY: Oh yeah, all the time. If they didn't wear it out, I got it next. We darned our socks.

RE: Who did the darning, Mom?

DY: No, I did my own darning on my socks. Poor people lived poor ways back then.

RE: Well, did you take those dresses when they wore out and make a quilt out of them?

DY: I guess they did, they made quilt tops. Quilted. They would get in groups, you know, and quilt.

RE: Did you ever do any quilting?

DY: No, my mother did most of it, a group of women in the community.

RE: Could you look at those quilts tops and say, "That's my favorite dress and that was Susie's dress and that was Bobby's shirt."

DY: Yeah.

[Laughter]

RE: Those quilts can tell a story, can't they?

DY: My Mother did rugs by a needle, you know, that punched up and down. Yeah, she made several rugs like that.

RE: Do you know anything about the quarries in this neck of the woods?

DY: About the what?

RE: Quarries, the rock quarries. Seems like there are several quarries around here.

DY: No, I don't know nothing about that.

RE: Did you all ever go out to eat?

DY: Oh yeah.

RE: You did, where did you go?

DY: Well, my two sisters took music in Hendersonville from Kate Dotson and we'd go to my aunt's and stay while they went with their music lesson. And she was a great cook, she had a gas stove and she'd light that thing, in a few minutes she would have a meal on the table.

RE: Did the gas stove scare you?

DY: Yeah. You know, afraid of gas back then.

RE: Ever had any bad experiences? Just afraid of it?

DY: No, just afraid of it. What did they do, give you an outline to go by?

RE: Yeah, we have a few questions we can choose from, but you've lived here for a long time. Have you always felt safe here?

DY: Yeah. I had an alarm system put in after Henry died.

RE: Did you do that just because Henry died, you were alone, or did something happen?

DY: No, I just did it for safety, protection, you know. Living so close to the road. But I hadn't had any experience with it. But I wear one of these alert things. It sets off the alarm, too. I feel safe, you know, if I am here by myself one night. I just figure I can mash that and get the cops here in a minute.

RE: What are the changes? What have you seen change about Fairview in the years since you've lived here, since you were born on Cane Creek?

DY: A lot of things. When we went to school at Fairview, they had an upstairs to it, you have to climb the steps to go to classes upstairs. They tore that down and built a nice building. And churches, we got plenty of churches, red light down here, swimming pool, library in Fairview. Lot of changes.

RE: So, you got everything pretty close, huh?

DY: Yeah, pretty close.

RE: Do you go down to the swimming pool and hang out sometimes?

DY: No, no, I don't swim.

RE: How about back when you needed to go to the doctor when you were growing up, back in those days, where were the doctors?

DY: In Fletcher. We went down there to a doctor.

RE: So, the doctor didn't make house calls? You all went to him.

DY: Yeah, like we do now.

RE: Did you go very often, or did you just go when you absolutely had to?

DY: No, when it was absolutely necessary.

RE: Did your momma have some home remedies that she would try before you would go to the doctor?

DY: Oh yeah. She would.

RE: Can you give me an example of a home remedy that she did for you?

DY: I was trying to think of the medicine she'd give, she got it from the Watkins man. Can't think of it right now.

RE: The Watkins man had medicine she could use?

DY: Liniment, yeah. Salves.

SJ: Sort of like Vicks. You didn't have the Watkins man in Tennessee?

RE: We did have, yeah.

DY: What part of Tennessee you from?

RE: I grew up in East Tennessee, in Kingsport.

DY: Yeah, I knew that.

RE: But I think I have a kindred spirit with your grandmamma and your momma. I think your momma and my grandmamma must have been a lot alike.

DY: Yeah.

RE: Did your momma wear the little apron and her hair in a bun and a little sun bonnet?

DY: She put a ball up on top of her head, you know, like they do now.

RE: Like a bun?

DY: Yeah. And the first hair piece I'd ever seen, my granny had it. You didn't know that she had it, but when she'd go to bed at night, she would take it off. And she slept with pillows on top of her head so she wouldn't hear the noise outside.

RE: So, did your momma wear a little apron tied around her waist?

DY: Yeah.

RE: Was she, did she collect pieces of string or keep the pockets full of snuff or anything?

DY: No, she didn't dip snuff.

RE: She didn't dip snuff?

DY: No. A lot of them did.

RE: Did your parents or your grandparents ever tell you about living in Fairview in the good ole days? Did they ever tell you any tales about the good ole days?

DY: Well, yeah. My granny, I guess, told the boys more spooky tales, you know.

RE: About living in Fairview?

DY: Well, about living where they lived down the road there.

SJ: Were some of those old mountain tales like tailybone and all that?

DY: Yeah, yeah.

RE: Did they have any experience, or was she just telling tales?

DY: I think she was just telling tales.

SJ: Like the Jack tales where it's like that thing coming up is going to get you at night, tailybone.

RE: Now, when you grew up, what big events had happened in your history, had there been wars?

DY: Roosevelt, he was president when I was in the first grade, I think it was. We lined up on Charlotte Highway and he went down. He went to Lake Lure, I think.

SJ: Franklin or Teddy?

DY: Franklin.

SJ: Really?

DY: Now I wasn't here when Teddy was.

SJ: I don't remember what years he was, I really don't.

DY: You do remember Roosevelt, don't you?

SJ: No, I wasn't born then.

DY: Wasn't you?

RE: So, you lined up on Charlotte Avenue?

DY: Charlotte Highway.

RE: Charlotte Highway.

DY: Yeah, right along where the school is now. We all waved at him going down the road.

SJ: I didn't know he'd come through here.

DY: Yeah he did. He's got a picture at Grove Park Inn, of him. Come through here.

RE: That left its mark on you, huh?

DY: Bonnie and Clyde, you know, was right up here on Gap Creek.

RE: Really?

DY: Yeah.

RE: What was Bonnie and Clyde doing up here?

DY: There were some murders, wasn't they, didn't they murder?

SJ: They did murders, but I didn't know they did them here.

DY: If they didn't do any here, they was running.

RE: Oh, my gracious.

DY: They caught them, I think, here.

RE: That was in your neck of the woods, huh? Too close for comfort.

DY: Too close for comfort.

RE: Wow, we haven't heard anybody tell about Bonnie and Clyde being in this neck of the woods. Or Roosevelt, for that matter.

DY: I'm not making it up!

[Laughter]

RE: No, I'm saying it's great that we are talking to you because we've not heard that from anybody else. So, that's pretty cool that you got to see that.

DY: Yeah, it was. Made us afraid, but we kept the doors locked. I had a colored boy stop out there and he said he was having car trouble and could I, could he borrow my phone to call his brother? Then he used the phone and then wanted to use the restroom. Which I shouldn't have let him in the house, but, I called the law after that cause when he come out he just got in the car and went up the road, he wasn't having no trouble. And the Sheriff's Department said I should have never let him in, he could have killed me or he must have been looking for drugs. But everybody around locked the doors.

RE: When did that happen?

DY: About a year or so ago. You never know what goes up and down the road.

RE: Well, you don't and it's easy to be too trusting, isn't it?

DY: Yeah, it is. Did you like Kingsport?

RE: Well, I didn't know anything else until I was 18. And I can tell you now that it is a good place to be from. I wouldn't go back to live there.

DY: You wouldn't?

RE: No.

DY: Henry's niece is a, what do call a dentist that operates on your teeth?

RE: Orthodontist.

DY: Orthodontist, up there in Kingsport.

RE: Oh really. How about that, it's a small world, isn't it?

DY: Yeah, it sure is.

RE: What do you think are the biggest changes you've seen in Fairview since you were born down the road apiece?

DY: Well, let's see. Biggest thing is the highways, I guess. Any of it, the swimming pool, the library and all of that. It's been a big change. The red light, grocery stores on every corner, Dollar Stores.

SJ: Dollar Generals everywhere.

DY: They wanted to buy that property there and I said, "Out in the country?" And he said, "We got them everywhere."

RE: Dollar General wanted to buy your property across the street?

DY: Yeah. But my son didn't want to sell it because of the traffic, you know, and right here in that curve, it wouldn't be safe. He went on down the road and got some.

RE: You still own quite a bit of property?

DY: Well, I divided it between the two boys. Randy got that up there, but Gregg got some of it too, then Gregg got over here in the bottoms, where they plant tomatoes and stuff. We grow tomatoes. Well, I don't do it, but we rent the land and Raymond Wilson grows and has Mexican workers.

SJ: Wilson Farms?

DY: Yeah, Ray Wilson.

RE: Do they have a pretty good crop, do they do pretty well with growing the tomatoes there?

DY: Yeah.

SJ: That's where we buy tomatoes.

DY: They say they brought a good price last year. They never did get cheap in the grocery stores, did they?

SJ: No.

RE: Do you get a special deal on the tomatoes grown on your property?

DY: Oh, yeah, he brings me all I want.

RE: That's a pretty good deal, isn't it?

DY: Yeah.

SJ: That would be Lisa Whitaker's aunt.

DY: Yeah, Mary Lou's daughter-in-law.

SJ: The one we interviewed, it would be her aunt.

DY: Yeah, yeah.

RE: Are you a big cook?

DY: No, no, not like my mom was and Henry's mother.

RE: Well, you cooked for three men.

DY: Yeah, I did. When I worked in Skyland, I'd come home, when I got a two-hour break for lunch, come home and fix their lunch, then go back to work. Did that for a good bit. Crock pots took place of—

RE: Talk to us about that, you worked at Skyland and you got a two-hour break during the middle of the day, it was lunch, then you had to go back and work.

DY: Closed at five.

RE: So, you worked an eight-hour day?

DY: Yeah. The way they arranged it, you know, you went in early and sorted the mail, then you took a break, it would usually run two hours, and then you go back and work the afternoon.

RE: And how did that work?

DY: It worked good.

RE: That's interesting, kind of like a split shift.

DY: Yeah, it was, yeah.

RE: But you would come home and fix lunch and then go back to work.

DY: Yeah.

RE: And then you would come home and cook dinner?

DY: Yeah, sure did.

RE: Oh, my gracious.

DY: It wasn't fun, but we did it.

[Laughing]

I couldn't do it now.

SJ: I couldn't do it.

RE: That made for a long, long day, if you had a two-hour day and still had an eight-hour shift.

DY: It did, it did. When I worked at Fairview, the carrier that went down the road and went down to deliver mail to Lake Lure and Gerton and down in there. And he would wait on me to sort it, you know. I'd have to go at five o'clock. You would see more rabbits and squirrels on the road that time of the morning.

RE: You went in at five o'clock?

DY: And sorted the mail, me and him up there'd sort the mail. Then he would go down the road and deliver it.

RE: So, you went in at five and when did you get your two-hour break?

DY: I got all day up there. I just sort the mail. Louise took off, the Postmaster.

SJ: So, you worked there when Louise Blankenship was there?

DY: Yeah, yeah, I sure did. Did you know them?

SJ: Yeah, my husband grew up going to church with them. He and Nancy went to church together.

DY: Nancy Haney?

SJ: Nancy Blankenship, yeah, she married a Haney, I think.

DY: She did.

RE: I think you both know everybody.

DY: Yeah, we know a lot of people because we was out in the public, wasn't we? What did you do, teach?

SJ: No, I didn't. My momma worked at the Middle School, but…

RE: So, what do you do nowadays to keep yourself busy, Desma?

DY: Knit and crochet. Henry's niece, she was not married and kind of old maid-ish. I got interested in going to this class over at Skyland and we made Project Linus stuff, you know, to give it away. And kids that are autistic, they make this blanket. They take old sheets and sew tunnels like in them and pile them full of stuff and those kids like that. They need the weight of it makes them limp.

SJ: I've heard about that.

RE: And you're doing that now?

DY: Yeah.

RE: How often do go over as a group to knit and crochet?

DY: Once a year, once a year! - once a month. Second Monday of every month.

RE: And are you teaching them or are you being taught?

DY: No, we just all meet and greet and show what we have made. A lot of people give us free yarn, because they got tired of doing it or something.

RE: And how long have you been knitting and crocheting?

DY: Oh, my mother taught me how to knit when I was growing up. They made little ole soakers, you know kids, babies didn't have diapers then. They made little soakers to put on the baby.

RE: Now what's a soaker, help me, because I don't know that word, what do you mean?

DY: Well, they called them soakers, it was just a diaper, they caught the pee, you know. They called them soakers.

SJ: Were they thicker?

RE: Were they knitting them?

DY: Yeah, we was knitting them. You start off like a point here and cut wider, you know, to fit up on their hip.

RE: And they were called soakers. And were they pinned in place?

DY: Yeah, I think they was. Because they didn't have anything to stick, you know.

RE: How about that. I bet when those things got wet, they fell right off, you didn't have to worry about changing them, did you?

[Laughing]

DY: They probably did, they got full of pee.

RE: Soakers. See we are learning all kinds of things, Miss Desma.

DY: Ole timers.

RE: I love it. Have you ever brought up soakers at your knitting group?

DY: No.

RE: I bet that would be fun to do to see how people would react to soakers.

SJ: Where do you do this Project Linus?

DY: In different places. Church give us their room over there, it's not a, it's a Presbyterian Church. New Hope Presbyterian on Sweeten Creek. They got a room and we all leave a dollar every time we meet, you know. They don't charge anything, but they do that to pay the light bill or something.

RE: Now do you knit and crochet when you are at home?

DY: Yeah sometimes, when I feel like it.

RE: Do you do all the Linus stuff or do you do other projects?

DY: We do other things. Then they have a tea once a year. This old lady had a broomstick. She said her daddy made it for her and she did some kind of crocheting on that broomstick. It was beautiful, it was lacey like. But she's passed on. We don't have her no more.

RE: How many people are in your knitting group?

DY: It varies. There's about fifteen or twenty that comes every time.

RE: Do you get out and do other things other than knit and crochet once a month?

DY: Oh, yeah.

RE: What else keeps you busy?

DY: Well, I just, you know, stay busy at something. There's always something to do, aren't there?

RE: Watching traffic go by if nothing else.

DY: I sit out here and rock for about an hour.

RE: Can you think of anything else we need to ask Miss Desma, Sandra? You think there is anything else she would want to tell us?

DY: Oh, I've told enough.

RE: Oh, I think it has been fun, you've told us about Roosevelt and soakers and Bonnie and Clyde. I'm telling you.

DY: Well, I hope I have given you enough information.

RE: Oh, yeah, this is the kind of stuff that's cool, though. That Bonnie and Clyde were in this neck of the woods. I don't think any of us knew that.

DY: Well, evidently not. They didn't tell it if they knew it, did they?

[Laughter]

RE: But, I don't know that we talked to anybody that was born at home, have we? Have we talked to anybody that was born at home?

SJ: Alma Biggs was, wasn't she?

RE: I don't remember.

DY: All my family was born at home but my youngest sister.

SJ: Bud Sales, remember, was born on his momma's kitchen table.

RE: Oh, that's right.

SJ: It makes his daughter upset that he tells that tale of being born on the kitchen table. She was telling me that the other day. "He didn't tell you that, did he?" I said, "Yeah." [Laughing]

DY: I wouldn't doubt it.

SJ: He told us and Keila was like, “Oh, no.”

DY: How they doing now since that boy died?

SJ: Ok, I think, it’s got to be rough.

DY: Oh, yeah it has to be.

RE: They seem to be good people. We have met some really good people talking to people. It’s fun doing this.

DY: You doing it for the library?

RE: Yeah. And we are just volunteering. We just had an interest. They did a call for volunteers and we went down and they trained us. We are pretty serious about it. There’s another couple of women that are pretty serious about it. There are others that do it, but we are probably the four that do most of them.

SJ: The other two do a lot, they do one a week.

DY: How often do y’all do them?

RE: Whenever we can convince somebody to talk to us.

[Laughing]

DY: Like me?

RE: Yeah. Do you know anybody we need to talk to?

DY: No, not right off.

RE: Yeah, we try to leverage it. I don’t know how they, we need to listen to their spiel sometime and see what they do to get people to buy into that. They’re good though, yeah.

Well, Miss Desma, is there anything you can think of that you want to share with us?

DY: I can’t think of anything else.

RE: If you can tell us about one memory of living in Fairview, what would it be?

DY: One memory.

RE: If you could just tell us one memory.

DY: About going to school.

RE: Tell us about going to school.

DY: Well, I started in first grade and Laura Jackson was our first-grade teacher, Ora Nesbitt, second grade, Eve Pittillo, third grade, fourth grade was. Anyway, we had the same teacher, you know, for a good while. They didn't retire then like they do now.

SJ: Were the Ashworths teaching then?

DY: Yeah, they were. Blankenship. We went through eleven grades there. But we graduated during the war. The war was over and we couldn't have a banquet, we didn't have a cafeteria then.

It was a log building down below the school building, they called it a soup house. I think you could get soup and maybe a sandwich there. But anyway, it's really improved, the school has, the school system. Guy Merrell was head of the board, you know, electing the teachers, and every one of them would send him a birthday card or a Christmas card. Stay on the good side so they'd keep their job.

[Laughter]

RE: Did you ever get in trouble in school?

DY: Yeah, first grade. We all went out. It come a snow. We didn't stay at home like they do now, you know. It come a snow and Miss Jackson said, "Now don't play in the snow, don't go out throwing a snowball." Well, we went out and boys went to throwing it at us and we went throwing it at them and she spanked every one of us. She just took a paddle, I mean a measuring stick and slapped everybody's hand for doing it.

RE: Was that the only time you got in trouble in school?

DY: Yeah, only time that I remember.

RE: Did you have to go home and tell your momma and daddy and get another spanking?

DY: Yeah. Back then you didn't get by much.

RE: I bet its different today.

DY: Oh, yeah, you know it is.

RE: Alright.

DY: You still recording?

SJ: Yeah, it's still on now. Not doing it until she says stop. So, you had Ora Nesbitt? I did know her.

DY: Did you know Ora?

SJ: Yeah. See I went to Fairview Baptist when Eddie and I met. That's where I knew the Blankenships, the Nobles and Ora Nesbitt.

RE: She knows everybody, I'm telling you, Desma, she knows everybody.

DY: When you live long enough, you can get acquainted with a lot of people.

SJ: Yeah, my family has always been in the area, too.

RE: Well, did you ever live any place else besides here?

DY: No.

RE: Just on Cane Creek Road?

DY: Yeah. Henry had family that lived in Kentucky and we'd go up there and visit and stay. You know, just visit.

RE: Did you ever think you might want to live someplace else?

DY: Not really.

RE: No, this is always home.

DY: We took a trip west with my sister and brother-in-law and I said, "Nothing is as pretty as home." Out west, you know, they don't have all this greenery and stuff we have. New Mexico was just a big ole red rock. We looked at the Grand Canyon, my mother said, "Oh, this is the awfullest place." She wouldn't get out and look. I said, "Well, you know, see this, this is, you know, something to see."

SJ: Yeah, it's pretty, I wouldn't want to live there, but it's pretty.

DY: It's pretty, it's different.

RE: No, I think we got the best spot in all the land.

DY: Yeah, I think we do, too.

RE: I think Western North Carolina is a gift.

SJ: And everybody is coming to it.

DY: What about it, they're building all these buildings, where do these people come from that are in them?

SJ: My husband says they are building nothing but breweries, hotels and storage buildings.

[Laughter] That's about all they are building.

DY: Well.

RE: Alright, Miss Desma, if you can't think of anything else, I think I'm out of questions. But it has been just so much fun talking with you.

DY: I kept asking Whitaker what ya'll did and she said, "Oh, just ask a few questions." She enjoyed having you, she said.

RE: Yeah, we just want you to tell us all about it.

DY: Now you going to listen to that before you turn it in?

SJ: No, I'm not, because I might accidentally erase it. So, I just give it to them and they listen.

DY: Let them listen, they cull it if they want to.

SJ: Yeah, and they transcribe it, too.

RE: That has to be tough, because we're not always just following a sequence, we are having a conversation. I mean the people who do the transcription, they've got a big job. But you are going to be in the Pack Library for prosperity. Isn't that great?

DY: Well, what about that.

RE: Can we get a picture of you?

DY: Well yeah, if you want one.

END OF INTERVIEW.